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Heritage speakers of Spanish in the US Midwest: Reported interlocutors as a measure of family language relevance

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an analysis of reported interlocutors in Spanish in a group of heritage speakers (HS), in three communities of the US Midwest. Participants were college-aged bilinguals developing their own personal and professional networks outside the direct influence of their parents. Responses are compared with those from two control groups: college-aged native speakers (NS) and college-aged second-language learners (L2). Seventy-seven per cent of HS reported speaking primarily in Spanish with 4–5 interlocutors on the week of the study. HS and NS reported more interactions in Spanish with older relatives, and more interactions with peers outside their family. Little to no interactions in Spanish were reported by either group with speakers younger than themselves. L2 participants reported more interactions with younger individuals. Sixty-nine per cent of all interlocutors reported by HS were their relatives. The *mother* was the most common relative with whom participants reported speaking in Spanish. This suggests that the previously documented importance of the mother for intergenerational transmission of a minority language extends into young adulthood by providing opportunities for use and motivation for maintenance.

Keywords: heritage speakers, bilingualism, Spanish, language maintenance, Latino, Midwest

Introduction

Researchers concerned with maintenance and loss of heritage languages (HL) generally agree that intergenerational transmission is the bedrock of minority language survival (Campbell and Christian 2003). However, intergenerational transmission is only half of the language viability equation. “Intergenerational mother tongue transmission and language maintenance are not the same,” writes Fishman (1991), “Without transmission, no maintenance is possible...But without maintenance (which is a post-transmission process) the pool from which successive intergenerational transmission draws must become continually smaller ... thus both processes are necessary for RLS [Reversing Language Shift] and one alone is not sufficient for that purpose” (113). While much research into Spanish

maintenance and loss in the USA focuses on children and their parents, an important task in order to understand language dynamics over a longer time frame would be to examine the experience of young adult bilinguals who are at a different stage in life.

This article presents an analysis of reported interlocutors in Spanish in a group of young adult heritage speakers (HS).¹ Participants were 71 HS between the ages of 19 and 29 attending university. The results discussed here are part of a larger study that examines relevance, reported use, socio-pragmatic awareness, attitudes, and phonological competence in bilinguals residing in communities of recent Latino settlement and low vitality for Spanish. Participant responses were compared with two control groups. The first included 23 second-language learners (L2), and the second, 24 native speakers (NS). All groups belonged to the same generational cohort and attended the same schools.

Participants were asked to identify five people with whom they had spoken in Spanish on the week of the study.² Respondents were also asked to identify individuals with whom they interacted primarily in Spanish at work, in school, and during leisure activities. This was done as a way to understand patterns of relevance of this language outside of the home domain. Responses were analyzed by relationship to the respondent, gender and generational cohort. Studying the language experience of second-generation bilinguals who grew up in communities with low vitality for their family language is relevant to test traditional models of language maintenance and loss. One such model is ethnolinguistic vitality theory, whose underlying assumption is that a group with low vitality will most likely undergo linguistic assimilation, while high vitality groups will likely maintain their language and culture (Yagmur and Ehala 2011). Within this framework, a group's vitality is determined by the interaction of *objective vitality* measures—status, demography and institutional factors (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977) and *subjective vitality* measures—members' subjective perceptions of the societal conditions that influence them (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981).

More recently, Lo Bianco (2008a, 2008b) has elaborated Grin's (1990, 2003) framework for the study of minority languages. A central idea of this model, originally devised as a tool for community, regional, and national language planning, is that the following conditions are necessary for language vitality and for revitalization efforts: *capacity development*, *opportunity creation*, and *desire* (Lo Bianco and Kreeft Peyton 2013, 1). Lo Bianco and Kreeft Peyton (2013) define capacity development as the development of personal language proficiency and use, through formal and informal learning (iii); opportunity as the development of domains in which use of the language is natural, welcome, and expected (iv); and desire, as the investment in learning the language, because proficiency in it brings certain rewards (vi).

One way to understand the results presented in the following pages is that the patterns of relevance reported by these HS is the realization at speaker level of what Lo Bianco and Kreeft Peyton (2013) define as *opportunity*: the use of their family language with interlocutors and in domains where Spanish is natural, welcome, and expected (iv). To distinguish it from community-wide measures, at individual-speaker level we will call this *viability of the family language*. We will further argue that examining these components at speaker level might help us to better explain, for example, cases in which community-wide capacity development does not result in more individual language use,³ and in opposite fashion, cases in which individual language use subsists despite low community-wide presence.

Maintenance and the dilemma of the second generation

Participants in this study were college-aged bilinguals developing their own personal and professional networks outside the direct influence of their parents. The reasons for focusing on this

generational cohort are several, but perhaps the most important is this: survival of the mother tongue as a minority language depends mainly on the second generation (Tannenbaum and Howie 2002; Fishman 1991). Velázquez (2014) argues for a three-factor model to understand intergenerational transmission of Spanish in the context of the USA. Success in this effort, she writes, depends on *quality and amount of exposure, children's opportunities for use, and relevance*. The reader will note here that only two of these three factors can be controlled by parents through family language policy (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008). Relevance of the family language (and, ultimately, its maintenance), will be determined by children as they go on to form their own networks. Additionally, relevance of Spanish will fluctuate across the lifespan because bilingualism is a dynamic condition (Kondo-Brown 2003; Valdés 2001). Thus, the data presented in the following pages should be understood as a particular point in a longer arch of time.

Here, an important question arises: Why would US-raised, young adults who could potentially conduct their daily life exclusively in English choose to use, and often study, their family language precisely at a point in life when they are constructing a separate identity from that of their parents? Carreira and Kagan (2011) explored this question in their survey of 1732 college-aged heritage language learners (HLLs) of 22 minority languages. They found that most participants reported studying their family language to connect with other speakers in the USA and to gain insights into their cultural roots (40). They also found that relative to other respondents, Spanish HLL reported high use in the home domain, but significantly reduced exposure in academic contexts (50), and that 71.1% reported studying Spanish with a professional goal in mind (51).

Motivation is not relevance, however. Relevance is language viability at the point in time of data collection. In other words, relevance of the family language is not what speakers intend to do, or why they intend to do it, but what they report as actually taking place in common, everyday interactions. To illustrate this contrast with a somewhat prosaic example, reporting one's intentions to increase one's weekly intake of fruits is not the same as reporting that one ate three apples and two tangerines.

For our purposes then, *family language relevance* will be defined as reported use of the family language in everyday interactions. Subsumed under this definition is the assumption of *viability*. This is, that on the week of the study speakers were using their family language with certain interlocutors and in certain contexts because they deemed it apt, appropriate, and suitable to carry out these interactions. Relevance in everyday interactions, we will add, is a precondition for sustained, long-term maintenance.

Socialization to language in an academic space

A second reason to study maintenance and loss in this generational cohort is related to language socialization. Participants in this study were bilinguals studying in universities where English was the majority language, and as such, they were undergoing a process of language socialization. In implicit and explicit ways they were learning, enacting—and in some instances resisting, ideologies about Spanish and its features, its speakers, its production and how it is taught, learned, interpreted, and understood (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). Although most research within the language socialization framework focuses on practices with and around children (Park 2008; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986), this concept is useful to address the ways in which young adult bilinguals *learn* the place of their family language in academic and professional spheres of interaction. Borrowing from this framework, we will conceptualize this as a bidirectional process through which these respondents were also socializing their interlocutors (Park 2008; González 2005).

"Learners are always agents of socialization," writes Esquinca (2012), "interactions between individuals do not only serve to socialize individuals into language practices, but also serve to mediate an individual's construction of identity" (671). As He (2010) reminds us, "To the HL learner, an HL may provide valuable personal, familial, and national resources, or it can become a linguistic and cultural liability" (67). For example, in contrast to the artificial separation of languages common to academic spaces, the language experience of US Latinos is polyphonic in nature and, as adroitly described by Zentella (2005), includes socialization to different dialects and registers not only of Spanish and English, but often of other languages as well (177). Additionally, for many college-aged Latinos, this experience of socialization often includes negative evaluations about the varieties of Spanish they speak (Valdés et al. 2003), about their engagement in practices such as codeswitching (Urciuoli in De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003, 12) and about their motivations for taking Spanish courses (Reznicek-Parrado 2013). Paradoxically, while Latinos may be evaluated negatively for speaking *the wrong kind of Spanish*, they may also be evaluated negatively for not speaking it at all. This situation was described by Sánchez and Chávez (2010) in their study of perceived Spanish language ability as a predictor of the extent to which college-aged Latinos were viewed by others and themselves as full-fledged minorities. Studies with adult learners of other HL suggest that affective factors such as negative external feedback may dissuade HLL from using their family language (Kondo-Brown 2003; Kondo 1997).

Reported interlocutors in Spanish

Relevance of the family language in young adulthood is one of the possible outcomes of early language exposure in the household. That the home is the primary site for transmission or non-transmission of an HL is a fairly robust finding (Fishman 1991, 2001). Children who maintain HL fluency into adulthood often come from homes where the HL was spoken as a matter of policy (Shin 2005, 17). Arriagada (2005) finds that when individual assimilation characteristics and family socioeconomic status are controlled, homes where children learn Spanish first and where family members share it and continually use it foster proficiency in the family language (615). Children are socialized for L1 and L2 development in the home (Reyes 2011), and learn about expectations of socially acceptable speech through interactions with different generations of their families (Park 2008). Factors that have been found to influence transmission within the family include: family type, transmission strategies, and language attitudes and beliefs of the parents (Schüpbach 2009). Parental perceptions about the benefits of bilingualism in their children have been found to be of particular importance in this process (Reyes 2011; Velázquez 2009; King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008; De Houwer 2009). In an interesting application of attachment theory to maintenance/loss dynamics in immigrant households in Australia, Tannenbaum (2003, 2005; Tannenbaum and Howie 2002) found that children in immigrant households were more likely to use their HL when they perceived their families as more cohesive, had fewer negatively loaded emotions associated with their parents, and showed evidence of secure attachment to them.

While parents are the most important source of HL input for children, and parental use of the HL is crucial for development (Shin 2005), studies conducted over the past two decades have contributed much to our understanding of the nuanced interplay between family language policy and household dynamics. Research shows that while it is true that in multilingual families all members contribute to household language dynamics, not all family members present the same opportunities to use and be exposed to the same languages and/or the same language varieties.

For example, Tuominen (1999) found that children in immigrant households socialized their parents and their siblings to the majority language, and impacted family language policy in indirect but important ways. Duursma et al. (2007) investigated predictors of Spanish and English vocabulary in a group of 96 fifth-grade Latino bilinguals and found that the language preferred by the parents impacted Spanish, but not English proficiency, while the language preferred by siblings had an effect on English, but not Spanish proficiency (185). The crucial role of the mother in intergenerational transmission and development of a minority language has been documented in different national contexts and for different family languages; among them, Spanish in the USA (Velázquez 2013; Potowski 2008), Japanese in the UK (Okita 2002), and Basque in Spain (Fishman 1991).⁴ One of the goals of the present study was to ask what happens to the relative weight of the family as related to relevance of Spanish and opportunities for use in a group of young adult bilinguals who are engaging in the construction of their own personal and professional networks of interaction.

Interlocutor gender and generational cohort

In this study, reported interlocutors were classified according to gender and generational cohort. Other studies have found that HS in the USA tend to speak their family language with older interlocutors, and speak English with interlocutors of their age and younger. Potowski (2004), for example, examined reported language choice of over 800 Latino high school and college students in Chicago, and found that participants reported use of Spanish 75% of the time with parents and older family members, but only 45% of the time with siblings, friends, cousins, and their own children. Following Ochs (1992), it was expected that results on the gender of individuals with whom participants reported most commonly interacting in Spanish would provide us with data into gendered activities that were primarily mediated through Spanish for this group of speakers. Eckert (2006) outlines the concept of *communities of practice*: social groupings that are formed “not in virtue of shared abstract characteristics ... or simple co-presence ... but in virtue of shared practice.” It will be added here that an important consequence of this shared practice is *gender socialization*. The concept of gender socialization was used by Arriagada (2005) to explain statistical differences between genders in reported proficiency in a national sample of first-, second- and third-generation Latino eighth graders. “Females are more proficient in Spanish than are males,” she writes, “in this case, gender socialization possibly affects the language situation of these children, with girls who are expected to be home more and help around the house having higher levels of Spanish proficiency. At the same time, boys may be encouraged to spend time outside the home; thus affecting their Spanish proficiency” (614). To the concept of gender socialization it is important to add here that of *gender segregation* or *gender separation*. We borrow this concept from Cameron (2005), who writes:

Females and males interact with one another at home, at work, at school, and in other public settings. Nonetheless, a persistent finding across multiple societies is this: Females and males, both as children and as adults, will segregate or separate themselves or will be segregated or separated to varying degrees. In other words, females and males are formed into or will form same-gender groups. Such segregation or separation results in distance. (Cameron 2005, 24)

While Cameron hypothesizes that gender divergences wax and wane across the lifespan, he predicts that they follow an irregular U-shaped pattern, with the greatest degree of difference in early childhood, and the teenage years, and later, in the post-work years. He predicts the least amount of divergence in the middle years of participation in the workplace (28). Although he warns that his hypothesis is macro-sociological in scope, and reminds his readers that gender segregation or gender separation is but one aspect of gender experience (29), his ideas are useful here to understand how, for the speakers in this study, patterns of gendered interaction might impact their opportunities to use and maintain their family language. In other words, we seek to understand if and how these expected gender divergences co-appear or not with reported language of interaction at a period in life when speakers are transitioning from adolescence into young adulthood.

Method

This study was conducted in Lincoln, Nebraska; Macomb, Illinois; and Ypsilanti, Michigan, three communities of recent Latino settlement and low vitality for Spanish.⁵ Respondents were university students between 19 and 29 and had to reside in one of the communities included in the study.⁶ HS had to have grown up in a Spanish-speaking household. L2 speakers could not have grown up in a Spanish-speaking household. NS had to have been born in a community where Spanish was the majority language and arrived in the USA after the age of 18. The sample was comprised as follows: 71 HS, 23 L2, and 24 NS.⁷ Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics.⁸

Potential participants were contacted from a pool of students, former students and members of the researchers' university-wide network. They were also asked to share researchers' contact information with acquaintances who might be interested in taking part in the study and who met participation criteria. Recruitment was done outside of class, with the understanding that participation or non-participation had no bearing upon their grade. The research questions for this part of the study were the following:

- (1) Did participants use their family language during the week of the study?
- (2) How many of the reported interlocutors were related to the participant?
- (3) What was the gender of reported interlocutors?
- (4) Did interlocutors belong to same generational cohort as the respondent?
- (5) Did participants report interacting in Spanish at school, work, and leisure?

Procedure and instrument

Respondents participated in an initial oral interview intended to collect data about Spanish competence, demographics, and language acquisition history. They were then asked to respond to a 4-part, 39-question online survey developed using LimeSurvey, a free, open-source application.⁹ Participants could choose to view questions in Spanish or English, and could respond using either or both. *Part 1*, which will be discussed here,¹⁰ was a 12-item, fill-in-the blank section designed to gather data on reported interlocutors, reading and writing, electronic media consumption, and social media use in Spanish in a common week.¹¹

Analysis

Participant responses were classified as *higher relevance* – between 4 and 5 interlocutors in Spanish on the week of the study; *lower relevance* – between 1 and 3 interlocutors; and *no relevance* – zero

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

	HS	L2	NS
<i>By community (N)</i>			
Lincoln	26	9	8
Macomb	26	6	8
Ypsilanti	19	8	8
<i>Median age</i>			
Lincoln	20	27	26.5
Macomb	20	21	23
Ypsilanti	21	22	22.5
<i>Gender: female/male (%)</i>			
Lincoln	62/38	63/37	50/50
Macomb	54/46	67/33	88/12
Ypsilanti	64/36	75/25	100/0
<i>Family origin: Mexico^a (%)</i>			
Lincoln	73	0	13
Macomb	77	0	13
Ypsilanti	36	0	0
<i>Born in the USA^b (%)</i>			
Lincoln	65	100	0
Macomb	85	100	0
Ypsilanti	95	96	4

a. Does not include families where one parent was from Mexico and the other from another country.

b. See Note 1.

interlocutors. Reported interlocutors were classified according to relationship to the respondent, gender, generational cohort, and domain. It is important to clarify here that the actual number of interlocutors in Spanish that week could have been higher, because participants were only provided with five blank spaces.

Results

The following section is organized by research question. Participants were asked to name five individuals with whom they had spoken in Spanish on the week of the study. Our assumption was that a lower number of reported interlocutors would be understood as lower degree of relevance of their family language in everyday interactions.

Question 1. Did participants use their family language during the week of the study? The total number of HS in this study was 71. Of this total, 55 (or 77% of the sample) identified 4–5 interlocutors in Spanish. Responses from participants who reported only 1–3 interlocutors merit further examination. These illustrate the bare-bones structure of maintenance, so to speak, in that they represent the last bastion of relevance. Twenty per cent of the sample (14 participants), reported only 1–3 interlocutors on the week of the study. Of this subsample, classified as *lower relevance*, 64% had spoken in Spanish with their mother (only 28% reported speaking in Spanish with their father). Other interlocutors reported by this subgroup were *friends* or *classmates*, *professors*, *siblings*, and other relatives. Four participants reported speaking in Spanish with only one person. In 100% of these cases that interlocutor was their mother. Only two participants (3% of the sample) reported no interlocutors in Spanish for that week.

Comparison with the two control groups affords us an additional dimension to these results. As expected, all but one of the NS in this study was able to identify five interlocutors in Spanish. Unlike

HS, however, NS reported speaking in Spanish with more peers. On the other hand, like their HS counterparts, a high percentage of NS reported speaking in Spanish with their parents on the week of the study (71% with their mother and 42% with their father). Overall, 83% of HS reported speaking in Spanish with their mother and 60% with their father. The lower percentage of NS that reported speaking in Spanish with their mother or their father can perhaps be attributed to the fact that most NS were living in a different country than their parents. More data are needed to elucidate this. In the case of HS, the reader is invited to consider the possibility that more had spoken with either parent that week, but that they had done so in English. As expected, fewer L2 participants (48%) were able to name 4–5 interlocutors in Spanish. Fifty-two per cent named 1–3 interlocutors. L2 responses evidence more interaction with peers, and suggest a locus of interaction mostly confined to campus or work. Again, this would be expected for L2 speakers, but contrasts with HS responses, which suggest a locus of interaction in Spanish primarily located within the family.

A relevant second step was to examine additional data that could help us to support or reject this idea. We did this by analyzing how many of the reported interlocutors were related to each participant. We then examined if all family members were cited with similar frequency. This is, if all family members presented the same opportunity for use of Spanish.

Question 2. How many of the reported interlocutors were related to the participant? HS reported speaking in Spanish on the week of the study with 296 interlocutors. Of these, 69% were related to them. Examined in greater detail we find that not all relatives were named with the same frequency. Results show that the *mother* was the most commonly cited relative (30%), followed by *father* (22%), and *siblings* (21%). Of the 93 reported interlocutors unrelated to HS participants, the most common were *friends* (54%), followed by *classmates/workmates/roommates* (26%), and *professors* (20%). These results are presented on Table 2.

Comparing HS and NS responses we find that a somewhat similar percentage of NS reported speaking in Spanish with their mothers (28%), and their siblings (22%), but that a lower percentage did so with their fathers (17%). Overall, 58% of all NS interlocutors were related to them. As in the case of HS, for NS the most common unrelated interlocutors were *friends*, *classmates/workmates/roommates*, and *professors*.

Table 2. Interlocutors related to participant.

<i>Heritage speakers. Name five people with whom you spoke Spanish this week (only relatives)</i>		
Interlocutor	Token	Percentage
Mother	61	30
Father	44	22
Siblings	42	21
Aunt/uncle	19	9
Grandparents	13	6
Cousins	11	5
Spouse/romantic partner	6	3
Niece/nephew	4	2
Other ^a	2	1
In-laws	1	0.5
Total	203	99.5

a. Other includes godmother (1) and relatives (1).

Several NS reported speaking in Spanish with their students, in-laws, and supervisors.¹² Additionally, while 16% of NS reported speaking in Spanish with their spouses or romantic partners, only 3% of HS did so. A possible explanation for this difference could be the effect of age—that is, NS were older, and potentially more were married or in long-term relationships. Another could be the effect of linguistic dominance/ intermarriage—that is, it is possible that some HS interacted in English with their partners because they preferred to do so, or because their partners did not speak Spanish. More data are needed to elucidate this.

In contrast to both HS and NS, a considerably lower proportion of L2 participants reported speaking in Spanish with a relative (14%). *Spouses or romantic partners* were the most commonly named in this subgroup (46%), followed by *aunts* (18%), and by the respondent's *children* (18%). As was the case for HS and NS, the most common unrelated interlocutors in Spanish for L2 were *friends*, *professors*, and *classmates/workmates/ roommates* (in this order). L2 interlocutors not named by HS were: *pen pals and study abroad host parents* (4%), and *waiters* (1%).

Question 3. What was the gender of reported interlocutors? The third issue to be investigated was whether participants reported speaking in Spanish with more women or more men. Importantly, this study differs from other studies that examine gender segregation as related to language use because our focus was not the participant's gender, but on that of their interlocutors.¹³ Because we were interested in identifying potential opportunities for use of the family language, our question was not, then, if more male or female participants spoke Spanish on the week of the study, but if they spoke it with more females or more males.

A second dimension in which this study differs from others is that participants were not asked explicitly to classify their reported interlocutors according to any predetermined category (including gender), but to name them organically. In our original design we believed that the gender agreement properties of Spanish (e.g. *mi amiga*, *abuelita*, *tío*, *mi papá*) would allow us to identify gender. This was indeed the case in our pilot, and in most instances of our actual data, including cases where the participant responded in English (e.g. *uncle*, *my grandma*, *my sister*). In the final analysis, however, we found that 21% of all interlocutors could not be classified by gender. These included unmarked responses in English (e.g. *siblings*, *friend*), and plural responses in Spanish that could include members of either gender (e.g. *primos*, *compañeros de clase*). This is an important flaw in the design of our study, which leads us to conclude that overall results for interlocutor gender are inconclusive.

Examination of reported interlocutor gender within the family, however, yields a clearer picture, as participants reported speaking in Spanish with considerably more female than male relatives during the week of the study. Table 3 summarizes these results.

Further analysis of results within each gender allows us to see a finer-grained picture: Not all female relatives presented the same opportunities to use Spanish. Once again, the data point to the *mother* as both the most common overall relative with whom participants reported speaking Spanish (30%), and more specifically, the most common female interlocutor within the family (54% of all related females), followed by *sister* (20%) and *grandmother* (10%). Overall, the *father* was the second most common interlocutor in Spanish within the family (22%), and the most common interlocutor among male relatives (56%), followed by *brother* and *uncle*. NS exhibit the same pattern as HS, in that *mother* (49%), *sister* (26%), and *grandmother* (8.5%) were the most common female interlocutors within the family. The most common related male interlocutor for NS was also the *father* (35%). Unlike HS, however, the second most common related male interlocutor was *spouse/romantic partner* (29%), followed by *brother* (19%). L2 results within the family yield little information because of the low number who reported speaking in Spanish with a relative.

Table 3. Reported interlocutor gender (*heritage speakers*).

Reported interlocutor gender (<i>heritage speakers</i>)			
All female	47%	Female relatives	56%
All male	32%	Male relatives	39%
All undetermined	21%	Undetermined relatives	5%
Total	100%	Total	100%

Question 4. Did reported interlocutors belong to the same generational cohort as the respondent? In order to understand the patterns of Spanish maintenance and loss at this stage of the respondent's lives, we classified reported interlocutors by generational cohort. Our assumption was that a higher number of interlocutors of the same age or younger the respondent would suggest a higher likelihood of maintenance. This, because it would indicate participation in peer networks where Spanish was vested with social capital – that is, was viable for purposes other than communicating with older relatives. We further speculated that participation in this type of network would offer sustained opportunities for use over a longer time frame.

Interlocutors were assigned to one of three groups. *Older interlocutors* included parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, godparents, professors, study abroad parents, and supervisors. *Younger interlocutors* included nieces/nephews, respondents' children, respondents' students and minors under their care or supervision. *Same generational cohort* included siblings, cousins, spouses/romantic partners, friends, brothers- and sisters-in-law, and classmates/officemates/roommates.¹⁴ Only two responses were classified as undetermined for cohort: *relatives* and *waiters*.

As highlighted in Table 4, both HS and NS reported more interactions in Spanish with older relatives, and more interactions in Spanish with unrelated peers. Importantly, a difference of 14 percentage points was observed between HS and NS interactions with relatives of the same

Table 4. Reported interlocutor in Spanish by generational cohort.

Reported interlocutor by generational cohort					
Heritage speakers	%	Native speakers	%	L2 speakers	%
<i>Relatives</i>					
Older	68	Older	56	Older	27
Same cohort	30	Same cohort	44	Same cohort	55
Younger	2	Younger	0	Younger	18
Undetermined	0	Undetermined	0	Undetermined	0
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100
<i>Non-relatives</i>					
Older	20	Older	18	Older	24
Same cohort	80	Same cohort	76	Same cohort	62
Younger	0	Younger	6	Younger	13
Undetermined	0	Undetermined	0	Undetermined	1
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

cohort. Again, the reader is invited to consider that these data do not mean that HS did not interact with relatives of the same generational cohort, but that most likely they were doing it in English. Little to no interactions in Spanish with younger interlocutors were reported by either group. L2 responses exhibit a different pattern, in that they reported more interactions in Spanish with peers inside and outside their family. Also, L2 participants reported more interactions in Spanish with individuals younger than themselves. As in the case of NS, this could perhaps be attributed to the fact that they were older, as several reported speaking Spanish with their own children, their students, and with minors under their care or supervision. More data are needed to clarify this.

Question 5. Did participants report interacting in Spanish at school, work or leisure? This question was intended to generate data about reported interlocutors outside the domain of the home. A larger number of interlocutors outside the home were understood as higher relevance of Spanish outside the area of immediate influence of the family. Participants were asked: *With whom do you speak mostly in Spanish in the following situations?* And were presented with three blank spaces under the categories of *at work, in school, and during your spare time.*

Almost every participant in this study reported speaking primarily in Spanish with at least one person during his or her leisure time (96% for HS and 100% for both NS and L2). An equally high percentage reported interacting mostly in Spanish with at least one person at school (96% for HS, 88% for NS, and 100% for L2). In contrast, a considerably lower percentage of HS and NS participants reported interacting primarily in Spanish with at least one person at work (37% for HS, 46% for NS). Notably, a higher percentage of L2 speakers reported interacting in Spanish with at least one person in the workplace (74%).¹⁵

Not surprisingly, *coworkers* were the most common workplace interlocutors in Spanish for the three groups in this study. However, while the second and third most common interlocutors in Spanish for HS were *customers* and *supervisors* (*friends* and *clients* for NS), for L2 speakers the second and third most common interlocutors in Spanish at work were their own *students* and their *professors*. An additional difference between HS and L2 participants was that 7% of HS (and only one NS) reported interacting primarily in Spanish with a relative while at work.

On the higher end of the relevance continuum, the percentage of participants who identified between two and three individuals with whom they interacted primarily in Spanish remains high for the domain of school (67% NS, 76% HS, and 91% for L2), but drops significantly in the domain of work (20% HS, 23% NS, and 59% for L2).

Results in the domain of leisure deserve individual attention, because they highlight important differences in the language experience of the respondents. Among HS, 89% of participants identified 2–3 individuals with whom they spoke primarily in Spanish on their spare time (92% for NS). In contrast, only 48% of L2 participants did so. Examined by type of interlocutor, we found that 80% of interlocutors reported by HS in this group were related to them¹⁶ (67% for NS and 26% for L2). Furthermore, 56% of the individuals identified by HS in this higher relevance group were older than themselves (39% for NS and 10% for L2). These results, again, suggest that at this point in their lives, and despite the fact that all participants were university students, shared the campus and belonged to the same generational cohort, they experienced bilingualism differently. Spanish relevance for L2 speakers was primarily constrained to the space of school, while for HS it was primarily constrained to the space of family and community.

Discussion

This article has presented an analysis of reported interlocutors in Spanish in a group of young adult HS in three communities of recent Latino settlement in the US Midwest. It was argued here that understanding the language experience of second-generation bilinguals who grew up in communities with low vitality for their family language is relevant to test traditional models of language maintenance that predicate minority language survival on demographic density, long history of settlement and public presence.

Relevance

Was Spanish relevant for the young adults in this study? One way to ascertain this is to ask whether they were using their family language during the week of the study. In other words, if Spanish was apt, appropriate, suitable to carry out some of their everyday interactions in a common week. If the reader concedes this as a measure of relevance, then the answer is yes. Seventy-seven per cent of all HS reported having spoken primarily in Spanish with 4–5 interlocutors. Only two participants reported not having used Spanish with anyone during that same week. Special attention was paid to participants who reported only 1–3 interlocutors. Their responses were understood as evidence of receding relevance. These responses highlight the importance of the *mother* as a source of opportunities for use even at this stage in life, when respondents were developing their own networks outside the direct influence of their parents.

Maintenance

Following Fishman (1991), we argued here that survival of a minority language depends on the second generation. Our assumption was that a higher number of reported interlocutors of the same age or younger would suggest a higher likelihood of maintenance—as related to relevance, exposure to Spanish, opportunities for use, and socialization to Spanish in the younger generation. Little to no interactions in Spanish were reported by HS with persons younger than them. This is consistent with previous studies—for example, Potowski (2004), which suggest that HS in the USA tend to speak Spanish with older interlocutors, and English with their peers. Considerably more NS reported speaking in Spanish with relatives of the same cohort. L2 participants reported a higher proportion of interactions in Spanish with individuals younger than themselves.

Gender and family

Overall, HS reported speaking in Spanish on the week of the study with 296 interlocutors. Of these, 69% were relatives. Within their families, participants reported speaking in Spanish with more females than males. Not all female relatives presented the same opportunities to use Spanish. Once again, the data point to the *mother* as both the most common interlocutor in Spanish within the family and the most common *female relative*—followed by *sister* and *grandmother*. Within male relatives, the *father* was the most commonly reported interlocutor followed by *brother* and *uncle*. These results support the idea that the previously documented importance of the mother for intergenerational transmission of a minority language extends beyond childhood and into young adulthood by providing opportunities for use and motivation for maintenance.

Spanish viability at work, school, and leisure

One of the goals of this study was to ask if participants interacted primarily in their family language with anyone at school, work, or during their leisure activities. This is to say, if they perceived these domains outside the home as viable spaces for Spanish. The highest number of

reported interlocutors was found in the domain of *leisure*, followed by *school* and *work*. Almost every participant (including both control groups), reported speaking primarily in Spanish with at least one person during their spare time. The importance of the family as a source of opportunities for use can be seen again: 80% of all interlocutors reported by HS who identified 2–3 individuals with whom they spoke primarily in Spanish during their leisure activities were related to them.

The last item to be discussed here is the seemingly counterintuitive finding that a higher percentage of L2 participants reported speaking primarily in Spanish with at least one person during the week of the study. Three hypothesis can be put forth to account for this. The first and most simple is that this is an effect of the sample. To participate, L2 participants had to provide evidence of mid-high to advanced proficiency (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL]). L2 participants were recruited from third-year Spanish classes, and, at least in one community, from a pool of graduate teaching assistants. A second potential explanation has to do with the way HS participants interpreted the question. As bilingual/bicultural, they most likely engaged in codeswitching and other bilingual practices. Thus, if any participants understood speaking *mostly in Spanish* as interacting in monolingual mode (Grosjean 1982), the likely result might have been underreporting of interactions in Spanish.

The third and most interesting hypothesis has to do with socialization to language and with language ability as capital. HS were attending universities where English was the dominant language. For most of them, English was the language through which they were constructing their identity as college students, while Spanish was not necessarily relevant to the construction of their identities as successful university students. In other words, while Spanish was a source of social capital in their communities and their families, it was not a source of personal capital on campus. In contrast, Spanish ability was a source of personal capital for L2—that is, it was a resource that gave them access to opportunities that enhanced their academic careers but was not necessarily a source of social capital outside the sphere of influence of the university. More data are needed to test these hypotheses.

Conclusion

In light of the preceding results, we may ask: what are the implications of relevance of the family language for maintenance? In this study, we defined the concept of *relevance* as reported use of the family language in everyday interactions. We further argued that relevance is a precondition for sustained, long-term maintenance. The overwhelming majority of HS were speaking their family language on the week of the study. Importantly, most of their interlocutors in Spanish were older than them and members of their family, despite the fact that they were university students developing their own personal and professional networks outside the direct influence of their parents. This highlights the importance of the family as a source of sustained motivation and opportunities for use at this stage in life. Equally important for the likelihood of long-term maintenance is the fact that HS reported almost no interactions in Spanish with individuals younger than themselves. This suggests that for the most part, the HS in this study were not themselves serving as a source of opportunities for use and for socialization to Spanish to the youngest members of their families and their communities.

One of the main contributions of this analysis has been to help us understand that for many college-aged bilinguals living in communities with reduced opportunities for use, their mother remains an important source of exposure to Spanish and motivation for maintenance even when not residing in the same household or even the same city. Additionally, the data presented here have provided

further evidence of the differential role of family members in providing opportunities for development of a minority language.

Further, because the participants in this study were using Spanish despite the fact that they were living in communities with low vitality for Spanish, and were studying on campuses where overall socialization to language was decidedly monoglossic, these results support the idea that from the perspective of the individual speaker, language choice is not determined exclusively by status, demography and institutional factors (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977), or even by speakers' perception of the societal conditions that influence them (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981), but by the additional factor of *relevance* – that is, whether the family language is or is not the most viable language to interact a specific interlocutor in a specific context.

The limitations of this study are several. The main one is that it is based on participants' recollections. The drawbacks of relying on self-report questionnaires as well as their long history in studies of Spanish in the USA are discussed in Potowski (2004). Other limitations include the size of the sample and the large number of responses unmarked for gender. Future studies must include larger samples and other communities in the Midwest.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this study and throughout this paper, the term *heritage speaker* (HS) will be understood as a person who grew up in a US household where Spanish was spoken, and who received all or most of her/his schooling in English, in the context of the USA. This definition includes transnational individuals who may have spent extended periods of their childhood in their parents' country of origin. The term *second-language speaker* (L2) is employed here to describe an individual who did not grow up in a household where Spanish was spoken, who received all or most of her/his schooling in the majority language, and who began learning Spanish in school, in or around adolescence. In this study, this includes 22 participants born and raised in the USA, and one participant who was born in Hong Kong and arrived in the USA at age 4. The term *native speaker* (NS) is used here to describe an individual who grew up in a household where Spanish was spoken, who received all or most of her/his schooling in Spanish, in the context of a country where Spanish is the majority language. This includes one participant who was born in the USA but was taken to her parents' country of origin as a baby and who did not return to the USA until after the age of 18. This group also includes three participants who were born in the Basque Country and grew up in a bilingual Basque/Spanish context. The relative degree of language proficiency across the three groups was established through the use of an initial in-person, oral interview with a member of the research team (all NS of Spanish), in which potential participants responded questions about their demographic characteristics, schooling, and language experience. In order to complete this interview successfully, potential participants had to use indicative/subjunctive contrasts, narration, description, subordinate clauses, and other linguistic tasks appropriate of mid-high to advanced proficiency (ACTFL 2006).
2. Participants were explicitly asked not to list members of the research team as people with whom they had spoken in Spanish that week.
3. Such, for example, is the case of Irish, as described by Ó Flatharta et al. (2008), cited in Lo Bianco and Kreeft Peyton (2013, ii).
4. In an interesting counterexample, Kim and Starks (2010) discuss the role of the father in maintenance of Korean in a group of first generation immigrants to New Zealand. Although the mothers were the primary caregivers and spoke almost exclusively in Korean, the fathers were shown to have greater influence in their teenage children's use of the family language because they expected their children's speech to be at their same level as theirs and made no effort to accommodate to their speech (295).
5. According to census estimates, in 2011 Lincoln had a total population of 256,189, of which 6% was Latino, and 4.3% of residents over the age of 5 spoke Spanish at home. Macomb had a population of 19,920 (3.7% Latino), and 3.3% of residents over the age of 5 spoke Spanish at home. Ypsilanti had a population of 19,880 (3% Latino), and 1.8% of residents over the age of 5 spoke Spanish at home (ACS; U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Beyond low demographic

- density and recent history of settlement, the following factors led us to classify Lincoln, Macomb, and Ypsilanti as communities with low vitality for Spanish: diglossia, reduced public presence and reduced institutional support for language, community-wide socialization to monolingual ideology, disconnect between in-group and institutional language ideologies and goals, decoupling of language/ethnic identity. Additionally, within each local Latino community: tension between in-group/out-group identity at local, national, transnational level, reduced contact with middle-class, upwardly mobile bilinguals, language brokering as motor for maintenance, and often, religious education as one of the few vehicles available for development of literacy in the family language.
6. As an example of the different linguistic environments in which Midwestern bilinguals grow up, 46% of Illinois participants grew up in Chicago, the third largest metropolitan area in the country, while 42% of Nebraska participants grew up in communities with populations below 25,000.
 7. The two control groups were included in the design of the larger study as points of comparison for both linguistic data—for example, phonological competence and pragmatic awareness, and results related to patterns of interaction in Spanish.
 8. The final sample included 75 HS. Data for the last four participants were not included here because they were collected after the present analysis was completed.
 9. Developed in six versions: Spanish and English for HS, L2, and NS.
 10. *Part 2* was a 19-item Likert scale designed to explore participant normative, goal and self-beliefs about Spanish, as well as their attitudes towards US varieties of Spanish, use of Spanish in public domains, and the link between ethnicity and language use. *Part 3* was a 6-item multiple choice and write-in section intended to examine socio-pragmatic awareness as reflected in their use of forms of address. Respondents were asked to choose the form of address they would use with an interlocutor in Spanish according to level or formality, gender, age, context of interaction, and degree of social distance. *Part 4* was designed to investigate how respondents produced and perceived rhythmic patterns in Spanish, such as stress and syllabic structure. This was done with the use of three elicitation tasks.
 11. For space considerations, patterns of media consumption and social media use are discussed in Velázquez (forthcoming).
 12. This speaks to the need to reconsider the appropriateness of using international graduate students who grew up in communities where Spanish was the majority language, and arrived in the USA as adults, as a control in a study about undergraduate bilinguals who grew up in US communities where Spanish is a minority language. Examples of this practice, however, are abundant in the psycholinguistic literature on HS. A possible counterargument to this objection is that these disparities in speaker profiles are a reflection of the real-life environments in which college-aged HS interact (or not) in their family language.
 13. Despite this rationale, the authors recognize that it is possible that a higher number of female respondents in the sample (59% of all HS) could have resulted in a higher number of reported interactions with other females. Participation in this study was open to HS of either gender, but potential participants had to self-select before contacting members of the research team. At the three institutions, more female than male HS expressed their desire to participate.
 14. The authors acknowledge that this is a preliminary approach, because siblings, or classmates, for example, could in fact be chronologically older or younger than respondents.
 15. As one reviewer correctly points out, even if reported use of Spanish was lower in the workplace than at school and during leisure, these results suggest that the family language was viable in the workplace for 37% of HS at least some of the time. Additionally, despite the fact that some respondents offered this information in their responses, data for place of employment, type of employment and relationship between interlocutors was not systematically collected, and thus, we are left with an incomplete picture of workplace interactions in Spanish. It is important to note, however, that in contrast to the five L2 and four NS who were graduate teaching assistants in Spanish, all HS were undergraduate.
 16. Includes spouses, ex-spouses, and romantic partners.

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